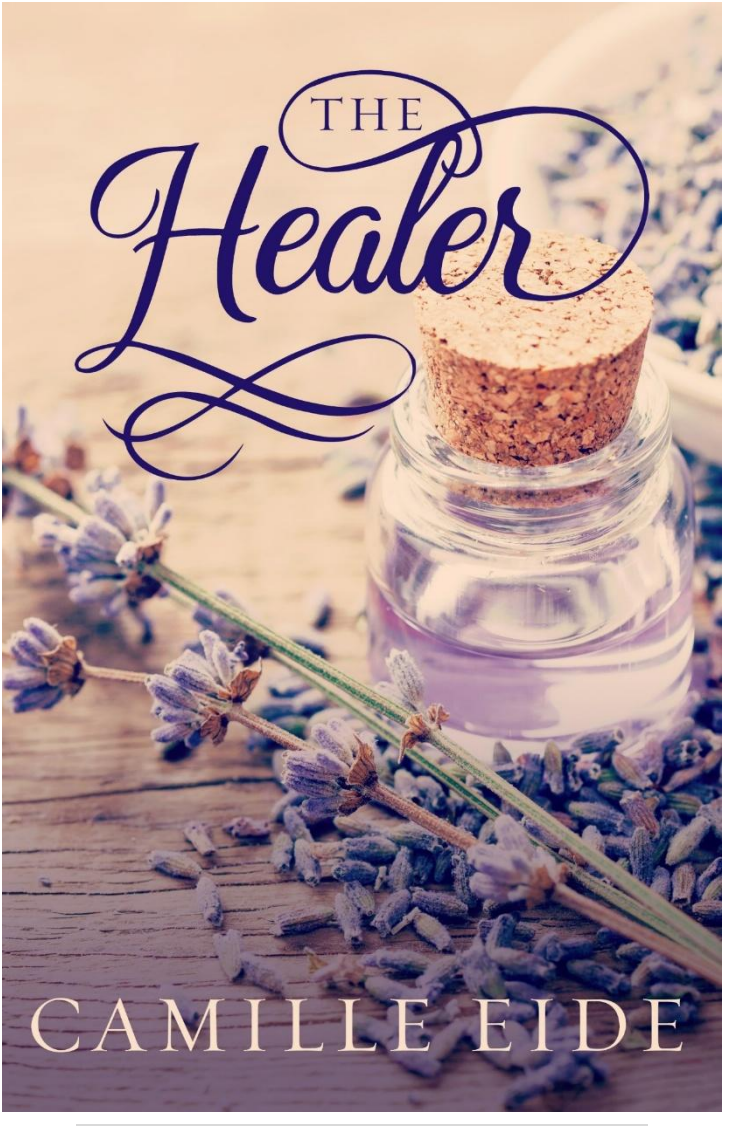
THE
Healer
CAMILLE EIDE

THE HEALER

a Love Story
by CAMILLE EIDE

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for Lisbet:
Takk for at du oppmuntret meg
til å skrive min første!

and for the One who heals:
"He healeth the broken in heart,
and bindeth up their wounds."
-Psalm 147:3

August 1913
Umpqua River, Oregon

OH CONTINUE TO LOVE ME, NEVER MISJUDGE
THE MOST FAITHFUL HEART OF YOUR BELOVED.

Hans rubbed his eyes and focused harder on the foreign words, penned in his wife's familiar hand. The pages of the poetry book were soft now, far softer than when Hilda had tucked it into the steamer trunk six months ago—and that, only as an afterthought. When Hans saw it later, Hilda confessed she had brought it because she hoped poetry would come to grow on him. After all, they were coming to America, starting over in many ways. *A whole new world awaits us, anything is possible, ja?* she had teased.

If only Hans had known what vital purpose the little book of poems would come to serve, and, unfortunately, how soon.

He read the Beethoven poem in Norwegian again, reciting the last line aloud.

"*Å forsett å elske meg, misforstå aldri det mest trofaste hjertet til din elskede.*"

Then, he compared that line to the one Hilda had written beneath it in English. Concentrating very hard, he tried to

pronounce each word aloud.

"Oh … con-tinue to … love me … ne-ver mis-judge …"

With a growl, he frowned at the remaining words. The trouble was not the meaning—he understood English much better than he could speak it. He practiced when he was alone, trying to remember the way he heard Americans pronounce things.

He glared at the handwritten words again. Now that he had to teach himself, he could only guess at the correct pronunciation.

"De most fait-ful … heart … of your … beloved."

He blasted out a sigh. Hilda had always been a lover of language, and it had shown in her passion for poetry, especially the Romantics. She, with her knowledge of English, and he, with his ability to work hard and fix anything, were going to make a good team in the New World.

Hans liked to learn new things, but language had never interested him and was certainly not his area of expertise. The plan had been for them to get to America and head west to the Pacific, where virgin land was cheap and plentiful. He would work hard and provide a home for them, with Hilda translating as needed. And as they settled into their new life, he would learn English, with his wife's help.

How quickly that plan had changed. And how vastly different this new plan was—*if* it could be called a plan. The life Hans now lived looked nothing like the life he and Hilda had envisioned as they boarded the steamship in Oslo back in February. Now, his life was a solitary existence; a low-ceilinged loft above a smelly livery in exchange for mucking out stalls, scraping together a meager livelihood making freight deliveries around town and the surrounding county. His clothing had begun to hang from his shoulders and hips in such a way that showed more than a few missed meals. But this lack was not what troubled him most. Without Hilda, whose sudden death had struck a crushing blow, he lacked a critical tool—the ability to communicate well enough to be seen as intelligent and capable; to be respected as an equal in an English-only speaking community.

The sun was coming up now. Hans tucked the book of poetry beneath his mattress, snuffed out his lamp, then headed down the ladder to hitch the team of draft horses. The wharf on the south bank of the Umpqua would soon be bustling with clamoring bells and shouts and chaotic activity, so the sooner he found and loaded his patrons' cargo, the more smoothly his task would go, and the sooner he could be on his way.

Today, the amount of freight on his wagon was nearly double what it had been the week before, which was good for business. But even better was the arrival of a particular parcel he had been hoping for. Hans had struck a deal with the Siuslaw-speaking man from the native village at the mouth of the Umpqua, near the sea. The medicine man did not speak English any better than Hans did, but a picture from a book was enough for the man to assure Hans that he could get this "Goldenseal" plant. The man was happy to trade for a set of Hilda's drawing pencils, all the better for Hans, as he had just spent the last of his savings on the most dilapidated vessel he had ever laid eyes on. But if there was a way to make the pitiful tugboat seaworthy again, Hans Friesen would find it.

Now, to find out if the plant in the parcel was the right one, and if the healer would find it useful. Would she be pleased that he had found it?

Guiding the team south, he followed his usual route into Reedsport, stopping at shops, homes, and businesses, unloading cargo and collecting his fees. But as he turned east and headed toward Crestview Heights, a growing sense of unease quickened his pulse. Only recently had he come to notice that this unease came with a certain weekly regularity.

The road took a gradual, fir-lined ascent toward the hills overlooking the town, toward the healer's house.

His pulse sped.

"Hello, Mrs. Sanders," he muttered to himself, then shook his head. That part needed no rehearsing. He went on. "I have dis … plant you are … needing."

He sounded like an idiot. He blasted out a hiss.

The gray horse snorted and tossed his head.

When the widow's house came into view, Hans broke out in a sweat.

At the crest of the hill, where the ground leveled out and the evergreen corridor parted, he caught a glimpse of the mighty Umpqua a mile away. On a clear day, he could see the shimmering ribbon of sapphire as it stretched north, then curved to the west, and then bent back on itself before flowing out to sea. Even from up here, the Umpqua felt powerful and constant, and yet calming. Alive, and life-giving.

Her door was open, as it often was in summer, but no one was around, so Hans secured the wagon and collected her parcels, adding the special item on top. Then he went to the front door and knocked on the frame. The sign beside the door read: HEALING REMEDIES.

Mrs. Sanders stepped into the entryway,

drying her hands on a towel. She smiled.

His heart skipped a beat.

"Mr. Friesen, the door is open, you needn't knock." Her hazelnut eyes twinkled, as if she were amused by his reluctance to come into her house.

But why would he? A gentleman did not simply barge into a woman's home uninvited, even if it was a place of business. She lived there alone. It would not be right.

Hans carried the packages inside and set them on the table she kept in the parlor for her patrons. The house smelled warm and welcoming, of mingling floras and herbs, of sweet spices, and of baking bread. He inhaled long and deep, making his stomach gurgle.

"You're late, you know," she said with a smile, then quickly sobered. "Oh, I hope you didn't have trouble with your wagon again?"

"Nei … er, no. I have … many stops." His gaze drifted to her light-brown hair, to the way it was pinned back loosely on the sides and then cascaded down her back like shimmering ringlets of golden water. He swallowed hard and forced himself to concentrate on getting the words right. "I have also … dis." He offered her the extra parcel. "I hope is … worth delay."

Brow raised, Mrs. Sanders took the package and untied it. She gasped and looked up at him, clearly astonished.

“Goldenseal? I’ve been out for quite some time. It has become very difficult to get! How did you—” She studied him, confused.

“Medicine man … send. For you.”

The glow in her smile made his heart race.

“I don’t know what to say! This is wonderful! Yes, I will take it, and more. How much do I owe him?”

“Is not … for sale.”

“Oh.” She frowned, her look instantly disappointed. “That’s too bad. Can I order some, then?”

Hans winced. He was not saying it right. “No, is … sample. For you.” Heart knocking inside his chest, he waited, hoping she understood.

She cocked her head and looked into his eyes, confused. “Then … it’s on the house?”

He froze. He did not know this phrase *on the house*.

Now they were *both* confused.

Lily Sanders hid her sympathy behind a smile. Mr. Friesen was clearly uncomfortable, even more than usual. Poor man. What she wouldn't give to see him laugh a little. Relax. Smile.

"So, when I run out of this, can I order more? I will gladly pay for it, of course."

With a sigh, he nodded, the relief in his eyes evident.

"How wonderful! There are remedies I have been unable to make without it," she said, still pondering its unexpected arrival. Some time ago, she had asked Mr. Friesen if he had ever come across the plant in his travels or while trading in other towns. He had not heard of Goldenseal, and she was not surprised. In recent years, Goldenseal had become scarce due to overharvesting. Now, only the native peoples were permitted to harvest the plant, and without limit. Maybe a medicine man *had* sent it to her, but not without being asked. This *sample* was clearly Mr. Friesen's doing.

"I think you went to a lot of trouble to get this for me, Mr. Friesen."

He shook his head. "Nei."

"I'm not sure I believe you, but either way, I'm very grateful. Thank you."

He nodded again, but this time, a faint smile appeared.

She returned his smile, her belly aflutter. Golly. If the mere *hint* of his smile could do that, she would probably faint dead away if the man ever actually laughed.

Lily set the parcel with the others, wondering if he had any idea how imposing a figure he was. So tall, so fair with his sun-kissed blond hair and sky-blue eyes. So handsome. And so serious. In the two months that she had known him, his deep reserve had grown to be both intriguing *and* unnerving.

"And please thank your medicine man friend for me," she added.

"He is … from village. By de sea," he said.

"Ah." Lily inhaled slowly, reining in her feelings on this topic. "So he is of the Umpqua people."

"Ja."

"How good of him to trade with you. Did you know this entire area used to belong to his people?"

He shook his head.

"But then they were forced to relocate after settlers discovered the salmon and timber and all the other valuable resources here." She bit her lip, but too late, of course. So much for keeping her feelings in check.

Mr. Friesen frowned. "Is … not right."

"I agree." Lily lifted her chin. "And I, for one, would be happy to trade with your

friend for more of this plant. I'd also like to visit his village, perhaps even learn some of their medicines. Share remedies."

The man's gaze flickered over her dress. A deep frown furrowed his brow. "Not good."

She stared at him. "I beg your pardon?"

His face reddened. "A lady … go alone … not good."

"What's this?" a male voice said. Chester Garfield, Jr. stepped inside, brushing past Mr. Friesen, and took off his bowler. With a smile, he offered Lily a bright blue box tied with gold ribbon. "This fella giving you trouble, Lily?"

"Of course not," Lily said, tamping down any visible signs of frustration. Reluctantly, she took the box. "Chester, you've met Mr. Friesen, haven't you?"

"I told you to call me Chet. And no, can't say that I have." He took an appraising look at Mr. Friesen. "Say, haven't I seen you stacking freight down at the docks?"

Mr. Friesen answered with a nod as his gaze skimmed the box in Lily's hands.

"Must be fascinating work." He turned to Lily and beamed a broad smile. "I telegrammed the Emporium and told them to wrap that trinket in the prettiest box they had because it was for the prettiest gal north of San Francisco."

Lily's face burned.

"See that?" he said to the other man. "She blushes. That's the sign of a *real* lady." Chester gave Lily a go-ahead nod. "Well? Aren't you going to open it?"

If only he hadn't brought her a gift at that exact moment, and if only he wouldn't press her to open it in front of Mr. Friesen.

Lily untied the ribbon and lifted the lid. A silver bracelet gleamed against ivory satin. She heaved a sigh. "Chester, it's lovely, but you know I can't accept such an extravagant gift."

Which he would have known if he had listened to a single word she'd said about all his other gifts.

Chester laughed. "Think nothing of it, sweetheart. There's plenty more where that came from." He turned to Mr. Friesen. "It just arrived, all the way from California on the S. S. Scarborough, the biggest steamship in the North Pacific. Heck, I bet that ship would fit a hundred of your wagons, and two hundred horses. Maybe even more." He eyed the taller man, jutted his chin a notch higher. "Just might have to buy a steamship myself."

"My heavens, what a busy man you are, Chester," Lily said, with the briefest pang of guilt for what she was about to do. "You must have important things to do and *so* many people waiting to see you."

Mr. Friesen tilted a curious glance at her.

Chester nodded. “Oh, I do. Very important people. And speaking of which, I’d love to stay, but I must go. Father put me in charge of his newest acquisition, the biggest parcel of timber you’ve ever seen, stretching all the way from here to Florence. I’ll have that deal sealed up tight before you can say Bob’s your uncle.” He winked at Mr. Friesen. “See ya around, errand boy.”

Lily held her breath and waited for the man to leave, and then exhaled. The Bible made it clear that patience was a virtue, but she was reaching the end of her supply. Mr. Chester Garfield, Jr., seemed unable to understand that Lily was not interested in receiving his gifts *or* his particular attentions.

Mr. Friesen pulled out a small leather pouch from his shirt pocket. “I … forgot.” He handed her the money bag. “Already dey want more.”

She smiled and didn’t let on that she had also forgotten about the proceeds for her medicinal remedies, which he took to consignment shops for her. She glanced inside the bag, wondering again why the man went out of his way to help her as he did. She saw him but once a week, when his Friday route took him past her house. He made great efforts on her behalf, and yet he barely knew her. While *she* wished that would change and that they might become better acquainted, he didn’t seem interested

in anything more than a business acquaintance.

He frowned. “Is … correct amount?”

“I’m sure it is,” she said, absently, still pondering the man. “Mr. Friesen, you deliver my goods to buyers and collect my proceeds. You even go far out of your way to find things I need. I don’t know why you’re helping me, but I want you to know how much I appreciate it. You’re very kind.”

He said nothing, only studied her for a long, silent moment.

His delivery fee! She gasped, cheeks burning. What a dolt she was! “I’m so sorry—what do I owe you?”

He sighed. “One dollar, and,” he frowned, thinking. “Twenty cents.”

Lily took the coins from the pouch and gave them to him, then glanced at his wagon, and took out one more coin. “And please take a little extra for your trouble. You really have gone out of your way—”

“No,” he said, shaking his head. “Is just …” he frowned, as if struggling to find the words. “What neighbors do.” With a nod, he tipped his hat to her and went outside.

“Wait,” Lily said, following him.

And wait for *what*, in heaven’s name?

“I wonder if you could use …” Frantic, she glanced around her house. “A loaf of bread?”

Head cocked, he looked as if he was

choosing his reply, but she didn't wait. She hurried to the stove and wrapped the cooling loaf in a tea-towel, then took it to him. "I have too much, you see." Her face warmed.

Mr. Friesen looked at the bread, frowning. He eyed her, then the bread again, clearly torn. "But ... is *your* food. Food you need, ja?"

"Oh, no, I have far more than I need. Please take it."

Hesitantly, he finally nodded. "Thank you." He lifted the loaf and inhaled its scent slowly, eyes closed. Then his face brightened with a pleased smile.

Her breath caught. She drank in the look of sheer pleasure on his face. "I do like to see a man eating well."

Smile fading, he studied her. "I am … *sørg* … er, grieving? your … loss."

Tears stung without warning. So he had heard of her Owen's passing. But then, Reedsport was a small town, and word traveled fast. Especially when the word was that the young woman living alone in Crestview Heights was a widow.

"Thank you."

With another nod, Mr. Friesen thanked her, climbed into his wagon, and drove away.

Shading her eyes, Lily watched the wagon until it was out of sight.

Between delivery days, Hans ferried across the river to the marsh where his crumbling “new” boat sat aground in the reeds and he worked on restoring it—patching, sanding, and replacing rotten wood and rusted metal bit by bit, whenever he had time and supplies. The blacksmith next to the cannery let him pick through metal scraps for anything useful, but it would take many scraps, and much hard work, and even then, Hans was not sure if the tug would ever float again.

And yet it *had* to. His entire future was lashed to the mast of that holey hunk of rust.

He ran his hand over the new patch, then filled the seams and scraped the sealing compound with a knife. One hole, one leak at a time—there was no quick, easy way to fix the damage done by storm and neglect.

He sighed.

Mrs. Sanders had been widowed for about a year, or so he had heard from the old Norwegian fisherman he had met at the cannery. It was not clear how Mrs. Sanders and her heart fared now, but Hans knew that being alone after losing a spouse was difficult at best. Grief had a way of clinging, weighing heavy like a sodden wool coat.

Hans whistled as he replaced rotten spots with new wood, to the tune of an old

fisherman's song he had learned from his grandfather in Norway—the best angler in the North Cape. The man had never spoken a word of English, but Hans had a feeling that his wise, old *Bestefar* could help him figure out a way to explain to the lovely, young widow that being a 'good neighbor' was not exactly the reason he wished to help her. Since he had first met Mrs. Sanders, he felt a powerful urge to support her work. She had a rare and special gift for healing and helping others. Not only did she make and sell medicinal remedies, but she made a point to visit the old and infirm, often administering her healing wares and services without cost. He heard she even prayed with them.

Since she lived alone, and was widowed besides, his determination to assist her in any way he could had become a kind of mission. He wanted her to have everything she needed to do her work. Until she remarried, of course, as then she would have no need of his trifling favors.

Because, as lovely, wise, and compassionate as she was, she would certainly marry again, and probably soon.

And whenever his dreams, whether by day or by night, urged Hans to think of Lily Sanders for himself, he quickly pushed them away. He could barely take care of himself, much less provide for a wife. She deserved a

far better life than the one he lived. He had plans, of course, but those plans could take many years to come to fruition. No woman should be expected to wait so long.

Besides, she was probably going to marry that Garfield clod, even though Hans found it difficult—and nauseating at times—to picture them together. Chester Garfield, Jr., son of the county's most prominent landowner, was clearly able to do far, far more for Mrs. Sanders than Hans the 'errand boy' could ever dream of doing.

~ * ~

Over the following week, Hans traveled through the county and visited the shops that sold her remedies, and the moneybag he brought back was quite full. Her tinctures and medicines had done very well.

Perhaps she would be pleased. He knew *he* was. Hans smiled to himself.

When he arrived at her home, the door was open, but he heard voices inside, so he stacked her parcels on the chair outside the door. Yet he did not want to leave the money pouch lying outside, so he waited. The new railroad coming in had turned the town into a camp full of railway workers. Most were decent enough men, but there were a handful of scoundrels and troublemakers who drank too much and often landed in jail. With the tavern so close,

Hans was not about to make Mrs. Sanders' home any more of a temptation than it already was.

"Mr. Friesen?" Mrs. Sanders called out. "I'm sorry, I'm in the middle of stitching a wound. Do you mind waiting a minute or two?"

Hans glanced inside. A lad, in his teens by the look of him, sat in a chair at the kitchen table, white-faced and wincing.

"Ja," Hans said. He only had two more deliveries that day, and did not mind waiting, so he took a stroll around the property.

A small garden beside the house supplied vegetables, flowers, and rows of plants and herbs. He walked to the fence surrounding the garden. Some of the plants had been cropped close to the ground, which seemed an odd way for a sensible woman to harvest her precious herbs. On closer look, the ground was trampled, and several plants had been uprooted. An animal of some kind, perhaps a goat or cow, had gotten into the garden and had apparently helped herself. He inspected the fence. At one corner, the rails had fallen, and the chicken wire was bent. Cloven hoofprints confirmed his suspicion.

Hans went back to his wagon, took out a few tools, and returned to the garden. A sagging fence was easy to fix, far easier than

restoring a dilapidated tugboat.

~ * ~

Lily gently cleaned the stitches and applied her special Oregon Grape salve, then nodded. “There now, Zeke.” She eyed the boy. “They should hold this time, but only if you follow instructions. No more wrestling until it’s fully healed.” She waited, brows raised.

Zeke rose and put on his hat. “Yes, ma’am, but Pa called me out. Couldn’t let the old man’s challenge go unanswered.”

“Honestly.” Lily shook her head, repressing a smile. “Your pa should know better. And so should you.” He offered her money, but she pressed it back into his hand. “You paid the first time. You can compensate me by letting it heal.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Zeke said with a sheepish grin. He nodded his thanks and left.

Lily washed her hands, then went to the front room. Mr. Friesen’s wagon was sitting out front, but he was nowhere in sight. She found her parcels stacked outside the door and carried them in the house.

As she set them on the table, the man appeared, his broad shoulders nearly filling her doorway.

“There you are,” she said, heart tripping, cheeks suddenly aflame. “I’m so sorry I kept you waiting.”

"No trouble." He quickly removed his hat and then held up a leather pouch, weighing it in his hand as if to show how heavy it was. "Business … good, ja?" He handed it to her.

She felt the pouch with a smile. "Well! I guess so! Maybe city folks are starting to realize that natural remedies are just as effective as those fancy medicines."

Mr. Friesen's smile faded, and his look turned grim. He drew a deep breath. "Medicines only … rich can buy."

He looked as if he had more to say, but was having difficulty choosing his words. Lily waited, unsure if she should try to help, or just wait. She didn't want to embarrass him.

"But sickness …" He shook his head, his lips taut. "Not so …" Frowning, he concentrated, as if trying to find the exact phrase.

"Discriminating?"

He didn't seem to grasp the word, and only looked more flustered.

She desperately wanted to understand what troubled him so. "I mean, sickness comes to everyone, rich or poor. Is that what you mean?"

He nodded, his jaw tensing. "Rich … have … better chance. Hope." He shook his head. "Poor do not have same chance."

"I'm afraid I must disagree," she said

lightly. “All healing is in the hands of the Great Physician.”

His gaze hardened. “God?”

“Yes.”

The man stiffened, clearly at odds with her statement. His chin tipped up. “God not heal … everyone. Not de poor.”

Sorrow pricked at her heart. “You’ve lost someone to sickness?”

Turning away, he nodded.

“I am sorry.” Her sorrow swelled to an ache. She drew a deep breath, hating to pry, but desperate to know. “Who was it?”

Still looking away, he said quietly, “My wife. Hilda.”

Lily gasped and covered her mouth. “Oh, Mr. Friesen, I’m so sorry!”

He was widowed, too? Perhaps this was the reason for his reserve, his solemn nature. “How long ago?”

“Five months.” The man frowned down at the hat he twisted in his hands. “Healing only for … people dat can pay.”

Fighting back tears, she said, “I’m sorry, but I don’t believe that. Healing is no respecter of persons. No one can buy it or … command it to happen.”

His gaze rose and he looked her in the eye. “*You* can. You have … power to heal.”

“Oh, it’s not me,” she said softly. “I might be able to treat symptoms, or stitch a wound, or offer relief. But that is all.” She

looked directly into his eyes. “I am merely an instrument in God’s hands. He’s the One who does the healing.”

He slapped on his hat. “*If* He chooses,” he said, and then walked out.

Lily stared at the empty doorway, heart sinking. The man had lost his wife. How helpless he must have felt to stand by and watch his beloved wither and die, her life cut short by sickness. Lily closed her eyes, forcing unshed tears to fall.

As wagon sounds faded away, she glanced down at the money bag in her hands and gasped. She had forgotten to pay him! She rushed outside and into the road, but the wagon had already gone.

Turning back, she noticed something different about her garden. She went closer and studied the area until she spotted it. The section of fence that had been trampled by the Stovall’s wandering cow had been repaired.

Lily returned to the road, wishing she could call him back. She stared at the empty lane, but in her mind’s eye, all she could see was Mr. Friesen, tools in hand, quickly and quietly repairing her fence, then going on his way without so much as a word about it.

Why would he do that?

Would she ever understand Mr. Friesen?

But perhaps she was being short-sighted. While the man intrigued Lily to distraction, it

struck her that the Lord was probably more interested in restoring a spiritually lost, broken-hearted soul.

And that praying for him would be a far better use of her time than trying to satisfy her maddening curiosity.

On Tuesdays, all the freight Hans received was for the mercantile a block from the wharf. He made many trips from dock to store, and while it paid well, it meant he would not leave the riverfront all day. He missed the scenery his routes provided. He preferred to travel about the surrounding area, especially now as the autumn days were warm and the skies clear.

As he unloaded the last of the mercantile freight, he considered taking a drive to Winchester Bay to walk along the beach as the sun set and listen to the crashing surf. Of course, as he had no one to share it with, he would have to enjoy it alone.

Did Lily Sanders enjoy watching the sea and walking on the beach?

He expelled a sigh. Whether she did or did not was of no significance to him.

As Hans carried the last into the store, he saw a boy of about nine sitting near the top of the steps. He recognized the boy right away. Bert had once traded Hans some fishing lures for a penny so he could buy licorice. The boy was now stroking a pup asleep in his lap.

Hans smiled as he passed by. Growing up, his best friend had been his Lundehund, Bille.

As Hans finished his business with the

clerk, a woman's voice rose above the conversation in the store.

"Bert Fletcher! Does your mother know you're dragging that wretched beast all over creation? Good heavens!"

Hans turned from the counter at the woman's sharp tone. Bert had come inside and was holding his very limp-looking puppy near the door. The grocery clerk came out from behind the counter and frowned at the boy. "You gonna buy something?"

A worried look creased Bert's brow. "Polly's sick. I think she needs medicine." He looked down at the pup. "Ma's too busy and told me to take the dog out and—" He glanced at the adults surrounding him, his chin trembling. "She said ain't nothing can be done and … and she said to take her out and leave her in the woods."

The clerk shook his head. "Sorry, but you need to take that dog out of here. You can't be bringing diseased animals into the store." A few customers muttered in agreement.

Shoulders sagging, the boy took his dog outside.

When Hans returned to his wagon, he saw the boy sitting on a crate beside the store, petting the pup in long, slow strokes. The dog seemed to be half-asleep.

"Please don't die, Polly," he whispered, swiping at his cheeks. "I'm sorry. I didn't

know you were so sick. Please don't die."

Torn, Hans studied the boy, and then checked his pocket watch. It would soon be too late to go to the ocean. He drew a deep breath and spoke to the child. "Sick pup, ja?"

Bert nodded, mouth drooping.

Hans came closer and looked at the dog, then stroked her fur, felt her belly. She looked weak, lethargic. He glanced at the boy. "You … want medicine?"

Sniffling, the boy shrugged. "I guess they don't sell medicine for dogs, Mister Hans. Besides, I ain't got money even if they did."

Hans stroked the dog's ears, thinking, and telling himself that he was *not* simply looking for an excuse to see Mrs. Sanders on a non-route day. "Maybe ... someone can help. De healer."

The boy looked up, his expression part doubt, part hope. "The doc?"

"No. Better."

Hans held out his hands for the dog. Bert hesitated, watching the pup, then handed her over to Hans. Gently, Hans carried her to the wagon and placed her on a burlap sack. The dog responded with only a weak whimper.

"I'm coming, too," Bert said, and climbed in with Polly.

~ * ~

An insistent knock at the door startled

Lily. She opened it to find a young boy on her porch, looking distressed.

"Polly's real sick, ma'am. Can you help her?"

"Where is she?"

The boy pointed to the yard. Lily looked beyond him, trying to see if Polly was a child or an adult, then saw Mr. Friesen leaning into the back of his wagon. Her heart lurched, then hammered in double-time. For him to bring someone to her door, the ailment must be very bad.

Anxious, Lily hurried down the steps just as Mr. Friesen came toward her—carrying a limp puppy. Her breath caught, though she wasn't sure why. Either from the sight of him gently cradling a puppy, or the idea that he had brought the boy and his dog to her for help.

"Bert," Mr. Friesen said, with a nod toward the boy.

"Hello, Bert. And Polly is—your dog?"

The boy nodded, never taking his eyes off the animal.

Lily stroked the puppy gently, making soothing noises. The poor thing was too weak to respond. "Do you know what happened to her? How long she has been like this?"

Bert shook his head.

Lily looked from the boy to Mr. Friesen. He met her gaze but said nothing, a look of

uncertainty in his eyes.

"Could she have eaten something spoiled or bad, perhaps?"

Bert shrugged. "I don't know. She started falling down whenever she tried to walk. Then after a while, she didn't get up at all." His voice broke on the last words.

Lily winced and glanced at Mr. Friesen again. This could end badly.

The boy saw her look and instantly teared up. He stroked the puppy's head. "Don't die, Polly. I'm sorry, I didn't know you were sick. Last time, I thought you were just being goofy."

"Last time?" Lily asked. "She's been like this before?"

Bert nodded, his eyes apologetic. "Yeah, but not this bad. When she did it before, she was walking funny, like fellas coming out of the tavern after they been in there all day." Chin trembling, he added, "That time, I … I laughed. I thought she was just playing, acting silly."

This gave Lily an idea. She gently pried the pup's eyes open, then checked inside her mouth. Leaning closer, she sniffed the puppy's belly. Frowning, she tried to recall all that she had studied about hypoglycemia.

Mr. Friesen watched her, his face concerned. "You can … heal dis, ja?"

Lily looked into the man's eyes. "I don't know," she said. "But I want to try

something. Just a minute."

She went into her house and searched through her shelves, pulling out jars, looking for something sweet, marmalade or preserves. But she found nothing. Mr. Friesen and Bert had followed her inside and waited nearby. Lily turned to the boy. "Bert, I need you to run to the house down the lane, and ask Mrs. Stovall if she has any jam or honey. All we need is a spoonful."

"Honey?" Mr. Friesen frowned. "I have. In wagon." He transferred the dog into Bert's arms, then hurried outside.

Bert cradled the pup and looked up at Lily. "Do you know what's wrong with her?"

Lily drew a deep breath and studied the poor animal. She was terribly weak. "I'm not sure, Bert. I'm no veterinarian. But I have heard of something like this. There is a disease that affects both dogs and people. It's called diabetes. It means there is something wrong with the amount of sugar in the blood."

"Sugar?" Confused, the boy wrinkled his nose. "In blood?"

She nodded. "Some people have too much, or in cases like this, too little. When there is not enough sugar in the blood, people—or dogs—act funny or disoriented, and when it gets very serious, they become sleepy and … can become very sick." Or worse.

Bert's face crumpled. "Is Polly gonna die?"

Mr. Friesen rushed in with a jar, opening it as he brought it to Lily.

"I hope not, Bert. But if low blood sugar is not treated quickly enough, it can be fatal." She dipped a finger in the honey, then lifted the puppy's lip and rubbed the honey on her gums.

Bert watched, anxious, still stroking the dog, while Mr. Friesen looked on in silence.

"There, now, Polly girl," Lily soothed, "we just want to help you feel better. There now ..."

Mr. Friesen drew in a sharp breath. "You can heal her."

"I don't know." Lily looked at the dog. "She's very weak. Even if I'm right, we may not have gotten to her in time."

The boy clamped his eyes shut and clasped his hands. "Dear Lord, please help Polly. I'm sorry I laughed—I didn't know. Please make her well. She's all I got in the world. Please, God. Amen." He opened his eyes and examined the pup, as if expecting to see signs of improvement.

Lily laid a hand on the boy's shoulder. "Good idea. Let's give her a few minutes. Maybe we should take her outside for some fresh air. Do you think she'd like that?"

Bert nodded and carried her outside, treading carefully.

Lily and Mr. Friesen followed and watched from the porch as the boy laid his pup on the grass. She whispered her own prayer for the poor animal, for the boy's sake. They continued to watch, waiting. So far, Lily saw no sign of improvement, and feared it might not end well at all.

"You have much … kindness, Mrs. Sanders," Mr. Friesen said quietly.

She stole a glance at the man, whose gaze remained fixed on the dog. The dog *he* had brought to her in *his* wagon. If not for the graveness of the boy's situation, Lily would have found his comment amusing.

He turned to her, his look instantly confused and wary.

Either Lily was terrible at hiding her thoughts, or he was very perceptive. "Sorry, I just find it ironic that a busy man who drops what he's doing to help a sick puppy is calling *me* kind."

Eyes softening, the man searched her face, his look unreadable. What he was searching for, Lily couldn't imagine.

"There is a great wealth of kindness in *you*, Mr. Friesen."

He stared at her, his expression churning, as if he were deciding how to respond. "Not wealth dat … pays rent," he said finally.

"Maybe not," she said softly, "but it's priceless, all the same."

He looked into her eyes, then sighed. He tilted his head and watched the boy speaking softly to his dog. “We … come to America, no money. Only … plan. I have …” He lifted his hands, turned them over. “Hands for work. Hilda had … English. But she got sickness. From boat.”

“I’m so sorry.” Lily swallowed the ache that had suddenly knotted her throat. “And you’ve been alone ever since?”

He nodded.

She drew a sharp breath. Losing Owen had been difficult enough. She could not begin to imagine the added burden of being left all alone in a strange country.

He looked grim. “Work to find is … hard if… English bad. For one man, is very small … life.” He shook his head.

Her heart ached. Clearly, the man was far too hard on himself. He was quite intelligent, and seemed to have already learned much in the months since his wife’s passing.

“I’m sure that in no time, you’ll be speaking English fluently.”

“Life is ... only ...” he rubbed his fingers together, as if meaning money.

“There is far more to life than money. You know what the Bible says about that?”

He shook his head, watching her.

“Don’t store up treasures on earth,” she said, “but store up treasures in heaven, for

where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." She smiled. "You are storing up priceless treasure, Mr. Friesen. I do hope you'll keep that in mind."

"Hey! She's moving!" Bert yelled. "Look!"

Lily and Mr. Friesen joined the boy in the grass. Polly wriggled and her eyes were open. Bert coaxed her to her feet. She was wobbly at first, but quickly gained her balance. He turned to the adults. "It worked! You were right!" He scooped up the dog and rushed back to Lily. "She's gonna be okay now?"

"I think we've figured out her problem," Lily said, grateful that her hunch was right. "From now on, you must watch her for signs of low blood sugar. If she gets to acting funny again, give her something sweet right away."

"Licorice?" Bert said, brightening.

She smiled. "Or honey, or half a teaspoon of your mother's preserves."

"Yes, ma'am!" the boy said. He turned to Mr. Friesen. "You were right, Mister Hans. She *is* better than the doc. Thank you!" Carrying his pup, he took off down the road at a run.

Awash with relief, Lily turned to the man, delighted to finally discover his first name. "Better than the doc, huh? I think you've been telling tall tales about me …

Mister Hans." She smiled.

He studied her face and hair in a slow, lingering way that stole her breath. Then he looked into her eyes, deep and searching, and yet guarded, as though he wanted … something. And knew full well he couldn't have it.

She froze, then remembered to breathe.

"I wonder, Hans," she said, heart pounding with a sudden burst of boldness. "Would you like to stay for supper? It's just stew and biscuits, but there's plenty."

Hans glanced into her house, his look torn.

The sound of people talking reached her just then, and Lily turned. Two women and a man strolled by and nodded to her, then glanced at Hans. The man frowned at the wagon, and the two women whispered and looked him over as they passed by.

Hans hissed out a breath, then headed for his wagon. "No. Takk ... er, thank you."

Taken aback, Lily frowned, sensing a change in him. "Perhaps another time, then?"

Hans climbed into the driver's seat as laughter erupted from the trio. He stiffened. His look was suddenly grim. "Farvel, Mrs. Sanders."

Hans flicked the reins and drove away.

Three days later, Hans was still thinking about the boy, and how Lily Sanders had cured that little dog. How kind and gentle and giving she was.

And how perfectly lovely.

And how close he had come to kissing her in the middle of her front porch.

And then, how quickly he remembered that he was in no position to make an offer of marriage to her, and therefore, had no business kissing her. Even if the lovely lady *were* to welcome such a thing. Those people walking by had made it clear that Hans was not part of Lily Sanders' world. And even though their opinion did not matter, it was true all the same. And Hans knew it.

It was dark by the time Hans finished his route, too late to work on the tugboat. Weary, he drove his empty wagon through Reedsport, eager to turn in.

In front of the Silver Moon Tavern, a pair of railroad workers hung around, and by the look of them, had already spent too much time and money inside. Raucous laughter drifted from where they loitered, and then one of them hollered at someone passing by on the boardwalk.

"Hey, there, I don't know what you're a-brewin' up at your place," the stout man said, slurring his words. "But I sure could use

a *drink*." He staggered off balance, then righted himself.

As his wagon neared the men, Hans saw that the person they addressed was a small woman carrying a basket. He slowed his team to get a closer look, but even though it was difficult to see in the waning light, he had a sinking feeling that the woman was Lily Sanders.

The stout man nudged a lankier fellow. "If there's a gal who can cure what ails ya, it's that one. I hear she's got a potion for everything."

Heat crawled up his neck. Hans could not see her face but suspected she had heard them. She did not respond, but kept going.

The first one stumbled out into the street. "Hey, purdy lady, don't be bashful. You got a potion for us, dontcha? Or maybe you're too good for us?"

Lily quickened her pace and kept going.

The other man muttered something vulgar about what she might be good for.

Hans reined in hard and brought the wagon to an abrupt halt in front of the tavern. He jumped down amid horse snorts and a cloud of dust, his fatigue replaced by a burst of fury. From the corner of his eye, he could see that Lily had stopped, but his focus was aimed on the two loud-mouths as he headed straight for them.

Both men eyeballed him. The lanky one

snickered, while the stout one raised an eyebrow.

Hans towered over them. “You ... need to learn manners,” he growled, teeth gritted.

The stout one belched. “Oh yeah? You givin’ lessons?” He belted out a laugh and nudged his friend.

Hans stiffened.

The lanky one nodded at the wagon. “Errand boy. Bet *that* was a hard job to get.”

Keenly aware that Lily was hearing this, Hans fumed in silence, seething at the men.

“What’s the matter, cat got your foreigner tongue?” the stout one hollered.

“Nah, he probably left it on *de boat*,” the lanky one said. He turned to Hans. “Maybe you oughta go back where you came from. Or don’t you s-s-speak good there either?” He laughed.

Seeing pure red, Hans approached the tall one, who was still laughing, and threw a hard right hook across his jaw, sending him spinning into the tavern wall.

The bigger one took a swing but missed, lost his balance, and fell against Hans, who shoved him off. The man stumbled backwards, also hitting the wall, and crumpled to the ground. The skinny one jumped up and grasped Hans by the arms, but Hans rammed him back, crashing him into the tavern again, shaking the building. The lantern above them fell and hit Hans,

scorching his sleeve. He slapped out the flames and eyed the pair in case they wanted more, adrenaline pumping, fists clenched.

The door burst open and the bartender rushed out. “What in thunder is all that racket?” Glaring, he surveyed the two men lying in a heap by the wall. “You boys better take it elsewhere, or I’ll send for the sheriff.” He turned and sized up Hans. “Listen, courier, we don’t need any trouble around here.”

Hans stiffened. “Only need is apology. For de lady.”

The bartender peered at Lily, then studied Hans again, as if trying to decide what to do. Finally, he turned to the men. “You heard him. Apologize to the lady, boys.”

Both men groaned. The bartender kicked the thinner one, who mumbled an apology. Hans glared at the bigger one, who also muttered a “sorry, ma’am.” The bartender turned to Hans. “You best be moving along,” he said, and then headed back inside.

Hans exhaled and tromped back to his wagon.

Lily met him there. “Are you all right?”

He said nothing. Too many things were racing in his heart and mind. It did not help that she was watching him like that, her rosy lips parted, her eyes dark with concern.

Concern he did not deserve after losing his temper and punching out a pair of drunks.

"Oh, my goodness, you're burned!" She stared in horror at his arm. "We have to treat that right away. It could get infected."

Hans grimaced.

"If we take your wagon, I can make a cold—" She stopped and looked at the wagon, then at one of the wheels. "Wait, I know just the thing." She crouched and looked closer at the hub, then reached inside the wheel and returned to him with a handful of black goo.

Hans frowned. Axle grease?

"Will you please roll up your sleeve?" She looked closely at the area as he rolled the cloth away from the burn. "This doesn't have the same medicinal properties as cold tea leaves, but it will quickly stop the blistering. May I?"

"*I* do. You will … soil hands."

"It's a little late for that, I think," she said, chuckling lightly.

Perplexed, he studied her as she applied the grease to his arm. He winced as she touched the burn, which was worse than he thought.

"I'm sorry, does that hurt?"

He shook his head, fascinated by what she was doing, suddenly unable to breathe.

Holding his arm steady in one hand, she worked quickly with the other, spreading the

grease lightly so as not to disturb the wound. Her delicate touch sent a tingle racing along his skin, like a lit fuse, and his breath caught again. She looked intent, her face determined. Her hair hung over one shoulder in a single, golden twist. It looked soft. Silky. And it smelled of violets and—

Gritting his teeth, he focused on the wound, on the sting of the burn. The burn he had gotten thinking he needed to defend her honor.

"Men can not ... to you … speak dat way," he murmured. He was finding it very difficult to speak. She was but a heartbeat away and smelled of late summer flowers, sweet and intoxicating.

She glanced at him, then lifted her shoulder in a shrug. "Sorry, but that's how men around here talk, Hans. This town is exploding with industry. It's a rough place."

Hans. His name on her lips twisted something in his chest. He swallowed hard, then watched as she took a strip of cloth from her basket and wrapped it around the wound. He continued to watch her, mesmerized by her hands, her quick movements, her gentle touch. He breathed in her scent again, unable to stop himself. Her ministrations immobilized him. He held his breath, consumed by a sudden fear that she would sense the war inside him.

Suddenly, she went still.

No. Please, no…

His heart pounded.

Slowly, she lifted her eyes and met his gaze.

He could not move, could not breathe.

Her mouth parted, and a tiny gasp escaped. A soft light flickered in her eyes, a light that ignited something in his heart.

A burst of raucous laughter from the tavern broke through the spell and yanked Hans from his stupor. What an idiot he was. An utter and complete idiot.

Hans drew a deep breath and stepped back. “Thank you,” he said, avoiding her gaze. “I pay.”

She frowned, her look clearly wounded. “You don’t have to pay me, Hans.”

“I give you ride?”

“No, thank you,” she said. Her chin lifted. “I’m on my way to take old Mrs. Roberts some elderberry syrup.” She studied him, the light in her eyes fading.

Good. This was probably for the best.

After church on Sunday, Lily came straight home instead of staying for the Labor Day potluck. She told the church ladies she had a headache and needed some peppermint tea. And while she did have a slight headache, what she really wanted was to be alone. To think. To sulk.

To ask the Lord why Hans Friesen was so, so perplexing.

And to ask the Almighty for the nerve to just come right out and ask the gorgeous man why he was so willing to help her and yet remained so aloof.

Aloof, except for a couple of breathless, close-quarters moments that left Lily wondering if she'd imagined the connection between them.

Was she the only one? She feared she was, and this fear was the only thing keeping her from telling the man that he had stolen her heart without even trying.

Before the water for her tea had even come to a boil, Chester Garfield, Jr. arrived on her doorstep. Lily was in no mood to be gracious, yet again, to a man who simply would not take no for an answer. She didn't have the energy.

"Hello, Chester." She stood in the doorway and did not invite him in.

"It's Chet, sweetheart, remember?" He

pushed around her and into the parlor.

She held her tongue, searching for patience, reminding herself that the man was not observant of things such as a lack of invitation. Perhaps such powers of observation had never been taught to him as they should have been. She just wished that the job of teaching a grown man such things were not falling to *her*.

"Mother is putting the finishing touches on our annual Labor Day picnic tomorrow. Garfield & Sons is known for putting on the biggest spread in the county. Mother and I would like you to join us. That is," he added, brows dancing, "*I* would like you to come as my *particular* guest." With a smile that oozed self-assurance, he waited.

"Chester, I appreciate the invitation, but I must respectfully decline. Please thank your mother for me."

"Decline?" Chester's smile wilted.

Lily almost felt sorry for him. This was clearly not the answer he was expecting.

"But … I told everyone you'd be there. Mother wants to meet you." He frowned.

"Then I'm sorry to disappoint you both." She went to the door to usher him out.

He didn't take the hint but stood in the middle of her parlor, mouth agape. "I suppose I should have asked sooner, before you went and made other plans. My fault, duly noted." He brightened. "We'll have you

over to meet the folks another day. Let's say … Tuesday."

She inhaled slowly. "I'm sorry, Chester, but I'm not coming to meet your parents on Tuesday, or any other day."

He stared at her, bewildered. "But you're my girl. You have to meet them sooner or—"

"No, I'm *not* your girl." How had the man come to believe *that*?

His jaw dropped. "What do you think I've been doing all this time? Calling on you, sending for expensive gifts, paying you special attention … why else would I be doing all that?"

Lily studied the man, stunned. "I certainly hope you don't think *I've* encouraged you to do those things. You're a nice man, Chester. We're just … not cut out for each other."

The expression on his face turned to stone. "*Nice*? That's all I get? *Nice*?"

"We're not sweethearts. We've never even spent any time together, beyond a passing acquaintance. And, as I've said before, I appreciate the thought, but I have never wished to receive gifts from you."

He frowned. "Well, if you don't want a man who can shower you with all the finest things and keep you in style, then what *do* you want?"

"I'm sorry to disappoint—"

"Not that *foreigner*?" He snorted a nasty laugh. "Say it ain't so, sweetheart."

Her heart raced. "I think it's time for you to leave."

Chester shook his head slowly, his face a mix of confusion and disbelief. "Now that's just insulting. The *errand* boy?"

She inhaled deeply, praying for extra boldness. "In the time I've known you, Chester, you haven't listened to a word I've said. You don't even know me, what I admire, what I believe in, what I hope to achieve. But I'm willing to forgive you."

"Forgive *me*?" He scoffed. "Do you know who my father is? The position and influence my family has in this town?"

She ignored him. "I'm going to give you some advice. If you want friends, be a friend. If you want people to listen to you, take time to listen."

His nostrils flared. "What would *you* know? You're just a *woman*, for Pete's sake! Everyone knows women only have half a brain." His eyes narrowed. "I don't know what I ever saw in you—you with your strange concoctions. You're nothing but an odd little—"

"Careful, Chester," Lily said evenly. "I wouldn't finish that, if I were you."

He strode to her, close enough for her to see beads of sweat on his upper lip. "Or what?"

Willing herself not to tremble, she lifted her chin. “Or your mother will find out that you think she only has half a brain.”

Worry widened his eyes. “You leave Mother out of this.”

She folded her arms across her chest. “And unless you want her to know that you’ve been pressuring me, ignoring my wishes, and being disrespectful, I’d suggest you leave right now.”

He stilled, his look dumbfounded. “But … you can’t treat me like this. You’re a pathetic little nobody!”

Nostrils flaring, Lily forced herself to remain calm. “Well, then I guess it’s a good thing you didn’t bring me to meet your mother. Goodbye, Chester.”

He left, muttering profanities. Lily closed the door behind him, hands trembling.

Late Wednesday afternoon, Hans cleaned the livery's tack, then took the saddle blankets outside to dry. It was still warm, even for September. He smiled, despite the last chore yet to do—mucking out the stalls. But soon, he would no longer have to do this. His progress on the tug had gone better than he had hoped. After the last patching and sealing had dried, and he had welded cracks in the boiler, he pumped out the trapped sludge below deck and then tested the vessel out on the water. And so far, the old tug had stayed afloat.

Afloat!

Hans inhaled deeply, enjoying this strange, new feeling of accomplishment. He had taken a risk by spending every last cent he had, and he had succeeded. He had restored the craft to, not pristine, but at least satisfactory working order. Now, with a tugboat of his own, the possibilities were endless. He would begin by towing log barges, and after he had made a tidy profit from that, he would add the biggest barge his tug's old boiler could handle, and then eventually, move up to a newer, bigger tug. The potential for hauling lumber and salmon on this river was endless, and would be highly profitable. He could expand and add more tugs, employ others—perhaps

immigrants like him who had difficulty finding good-paying employment due to the kinds of barriers that had nothing to do with their ability to work hard.

It would feel good to be doing well, to have finally improved his financial position. To be able to—

Take proper care of a wife. A family.

But this would take some time. Would she still be free by then? And if she was, would she consider him?

Inside the livery, Hans wheeled the tools into the first stall. As he raked out the smelly contents and scooped it into the wheelbarrow, he took his mind off the task by picturing himself at the wheel of a steamship or a schooner, navigating the mighty Umpqua.

But as gratifying as that vision was, the picture of himself standing alone at the helm of any craft rang hollow.

"Heya, Swede. Didn't I see you over at Lily Sanders' house a while back?"

Hans stiffened and looked over his shoulder, knowing full well who he would see. Chester Garfield, Jr. stood in the stable doorway, his bowler tipped at a ridiculous angle, hands on hips as if he owned the place. Perhaps he did now, as quickly as he and his father were grabbing up property in the area.

"I didn't mean to intrude on your little …

errand there the other day," the man added.

Hans said nothing, only resumed cleaning.

"I'm afraid that was rude of me, giving Lily a gift while you were there, wasn't it?" The man stepped closer. "Come to think of it, that must've been awkward for you, huh?"

With a frown, Hans stopped and studied the man, wondering what he was getting at.

Garfield's face had a phony look of pained contrition. "Gee, I sure hope my giving her a gift didn't … upset you, did it?" The man held himself oddly still, as if he were holding his breath, waiting for Hans to respond.

Hans shoveled a scoop of manure and tossed it into the wheelbarrow, using a little more force than necessary, hoping some would land on the man's shiny shoes. It was the chance a fellow took by coming into a stable dressed like a dandy.

"Not my … business."

"No?" Chester's face brightened like an electric light bulb. "No, that's right, it *isn't* your business, is it?" He grinned. "Because you're just an errand boy. You have nothing to do with her personal affairs, now do you?"

Stewing in silence, Hans scooped and flung another shovelful. Somehow, Chester Garfield, Jr. had managed to slither into Lily's life. She was smart. She should have been able to see what a snake he was. But

she was also kind and gracious. She probably accepted and valued him the same way she accepted and valued everyone.

Garfield stepped closer and took a look around the stall. His nostrils flared. “Ugh, what a foul job. Good thing there are people like you willing to do it.”

Jaw muscles clenching, Hans scooped a pitchfork full of straw and tossed it into a stall, itching to wipe the sneer off the man’s face.

“But just so you know, when Lily and I are married, she won’t be needing your, uh, services anymore.”

Pitchfork in hand, Hans froze.

Married?

Should he be surprised? After all, he had suspected this, ja?

But … she was going to marry *him?*

Heart sinking, Hans just stood there like a fencepost, tool clenched in his fist, nostrils flaring. He did not *want* to imagine them together. He *could* not. Feeling as if he would be sick, Hans stole a look at the guy, and immediately wished he had not.

Garfield looked like a contented cat, a smug smile on his insipid face.

“Yeah, as a matter of fact,” the man went on slowly, “that’s the reason I stopped by. If you would take Mrs. Sanders off your route beginning today, you’d be doing us both a big favor. I’ll gladly pay you whatever you

would have made for the rest of the month."

"She will not ... sell her remedies?"

"Sure, but *I'll* be taking over the operation from here on out. Business *is* my area of expertise, you know." He looked up and down the length of Hans' coveralls. "Just like shoveling manure is yours." He grinned.

Hans stifled an urge to toss the man into the manure where he belonged. The perfumed dandy had probably never worked an honest day in his life. Then he remembered the agreement he had with shops that sold Lily's remedies on consignment, and that he had planned to pick up her proceeds on his next trip. "I will … collect for her and … finish."

Garfield shook his head and then leaned closer, conspiratorially. "Sorry to have to be the one to say it, but the truth is, she's in a real pickle because she doesn't have the heart to tell you she doesn't want you coming around anymore." He pulled out his billfold. "But if you just stopped showing up, that would make it a *whole* lot easier for her, see? And anything that makes my sweetheart's life easier, makes me a happy man."

Pain washed over Hans. The idea of her with this man made him physically sick. "She ... wishes I not come back?"

Garfield glanced around, as if looking for

something. “She’s just too doggone nice to say it to your face.” He lifted his chin and peered at Hans. “Truth is, she only lets you deliver for her because she feels sorry for you. Because … you know. Your accent and all.”

Accent?

Stunned, Hans closed his eyes. When he opened them, Garfield was watching him. Closely.

“She sure pities the poor and the lowly. What a gal. She’s always wanting to help.”

Pity? He felt numb. Pity was the very last thing Hans wanted from Lily Sanders.

“I try to rein her in,” Garfield added with a sigh, “but she just keeps getting more involved than she meant to and then she can’t figure out a polite way to get out of it.”

Pain tore through his heart, but he forced himself to appear unmoved. He would not show the man what a blow he had just delivered. He had not expected to feel this way, to feel such loss. Such crushing loss.

“Yep, she sure pities you,” Garfield went on. “You can return her kindness by just disappearing, quiet-like.” He held out a bill. “Here you go, and keep the change.” He leaned in with an exaggerated look of concern. “She’d like that.”

Then Garfield strolled out, leaving Hans standing in the middle of a stinky stall, pitchfork in one hand, five dollars in the

other.

You're a fool, Friesen.

A fool to be devastated by this news.

A fool to mourn the loss of what was never yours.

~ * ~

He had to get away. For a few days, a few weeks, he did not care. He could not stand by and watch her marry *that* guy.

And even worse: he could not bear her pity.

Hans packed his knapsack, then went to the wharf to find the timber manager who contracted the log barges. The sooner he could pick up a load, the sooner he could be on his way upriver.

He checked with everyone on the wharf with no luck, but he did find out from the old Norwegian that a cargo ship, the S. S. Marion, was preparing to take a load to San Francisco, and the ship sorely needed deck hands. Hans signed on, glad that he would not only make a bundle of money, but that he could get away. *Far* away. Maybe when he arrived in San Francisco, he could board another ship and keep going. See the world.

But first, he had to find someone he could trust to take over his deliveries, as the people on his routes counted on him. He could probably pay Bert's older brother, Ben, to do it.

There was one more thing he needed to do. Even if Garfield thought Hans ought to disappear "quiet-like," he still wanted Lily to know that even though he would no longer be coming around, the things she had entrusted to him would be taken care of, and in good hands.

As he headed to meet with Bert and his brother, Hans realized that there were a great many things he wanted to tell Lily Sanders. Things like...

You have captivated me, heart, mind and soul. Your kindness inspires me. Your laugh lifts me. Your beauty stirs me. Your smile weakens me. Your touch haunts me, makes me long for you.

I love you, dearest Lily.

But she was not his, and these things were not his to say.

And there was something else he believed she would want to know. She had spoken of being an instrument in God's hands, an instrument of healing.

He did not know when, exactly, but somehow, a patching up of sorts had occurred inside him, like the way he had patched that old tug. The life was no longer draining from him. He had risen above the struggle to simply survive. Now, he had a real glimmer of hope.

And Lily had been instrumental in this. She had spoken of being an instrument in

God's hands, an instrument of healing. Perhaps this was what had happened to him. Perhaps the One whose healing touch flowed through her hands had been at work in him, too.

Hans had been given a second chance.

Hans took paper and pen from his knapsack and stared at the blank paper.

Ja, he needed to tell Lily something, but he had no idea *what* to say, or how to say it.

Friday morning, Lily spent a little longer than usual on her hair and dress. No, *more* than a little longer. For days, she had rehearsed what she was going to say to Hans the next time she saw him. After their last encounter in front of the tavern, she realized she could no longer keep silent. If she didn't tell Hans what was in her heart, she would just burst. She didn't care if it was improper for a woman to speak so plainly or boldly.

Yet it wasn't breaking propriety that worried her—it was how Hans would respond to the baring of her heart, and finding out what he felt—if anything—for her. Did he return her feelings? Did he need more time to mourn the loss of his wife, to heal? She prayed for him daily and knew that the Lord could bring peace and healing to a grieving heart.

If Hans thought there was a chance that he might one day see her in that way, she could wait for him.

She closed her eyes and imagined his smile.

Ohhh, yes, she could wait.

But as she checked herself in the looking glass for the twentieth time, Lily let out a sigh and wished he wouldn't keep her waiting *today*.

As the morning stretched into afternoon, Lily was certain she had worn a groove in her floor, checking the window or the door every time she heard a wagon or automobile pass by.

Something had delayed him. His wagon, perhaps? One time, he hadn't shown up until late evening when an axle had come loose and had thrown him and half his freight into a ditch.

By suppertime, Lily was a ball of nerves. Of course, *this* would be the day he would be delayed.

She lit the lamp outside her front door just as a wagon rattled up the lane. Heart thumping, she sucked in a deep breath and donned a welcoming smile. As it drew nearer, she focused harder. The wagon looked familiar, but its pair of young drivers did not.

The wagon came to a stop in her yard. Bert, the boy with the sick puppy, hopped down, followed by an older boy. Lily glanced over the wagon. Yes, it was the one that Hans drove. She greeted the boys with a weak smile that she hoped did not reveal her disappointment.

"Hello, Bert. Who is this?"

"This is Ben, my big brother."

While Bert gave her an update on little Polly, Ben rummaged in the bed of the wagon and then came up the steps with

parcels and a money pouch. “Here you go, ma’am.”

A sinking feeling pressed on her heart. “Is Mister Hans unwell?”

“No, ma’am,” Bert said, returning to the wagon. “He’s gone.”

“Gone?” she gasped. Numb, she followed him. “Gone where?”

“San Francisco. He asked us to take over his deliveries. He don’t know when he’ll be back, or if he’ll ever come back at all.”

Never come back? Unable to breathe, she took hold of the wagon and steadied herself.

“You okay, ma’am?” Ben asked. “You don’t look so good.”

“I’m alright. I’m just …”

Shaken. Deeply. This was so unexpected.

“Did he say why he was going to San Francisco?”

“No, ma’am. Say, you’re kinda pale,” Ben said. “Maybe you need to eat something.”

He was probably right. She hadn’t eaten all day, in her eagerness to see Hans.

“Oh, I almost forgot.” Bert went and took something from the driver’s seat and then handed her an envelope. “He wanted me to give you this.”

The envelope had *Mrs. Sanders* written on it.

Barely aware of what she was doing, she

paid the boys and thanked them, and as they drove away, she tugged out the neatly penned letter. It read:

Dear Mrs. Sanders,

I wish for you every happiness in your marriage.

Marriage?

Lily stared at the word, jaw agape. What on earth was he talking about?

I am sorry, but I can no longer deliver for you. I have taken work on a cargo ship, but one day, I hope to start my own freight business. I am sending someone trustworthy to finish the job you trusted to me.

You are an extraordinary woman with a rare gift. You do much good for many people. And your faith in the 'Great Physician' has inspired me to hope. Perhaps you understand why hope is a thing I thought I had lost. But an American poet once said, "Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul, and sings the tune without the words, and never stops at all."

For this hope, I am forever in your debt. Your every act of kindness to me is a precious memory I will always treasure. I hope Mr. Garfield endeavors to deserve you.

Yours Truly,

Hans Friesen

Mouth ajar, Lily stared at the page in her hand, unable to move, baffled. What made him think she was marrying Chester Garfield?

And why had he suddenly gone away?

She re-read the letter several times until she could no longer see the words through her tears. She closed her eyes. His mistaken notion that she was to be married wasn't the only thing that confused her. That he held her in such high esteem …

How reserved Hans had always been, and yet, in this letter, he was thanking her and crediting her for things he treasured, things she had no idea she had done.

Lily read his letter again, this time carefully exploring what he was saying, and what he was not saying.

What else might Hans say to her, if he knew she had no intention of marrying Chester?

There was only one way to find out.

San Francisco's harbor was a clanging throng of activity, but for Hans, the chaos was a welcome distraction. It had taken a day or two for him to get accustomed to his new job, and while he still had a lot to learn, he felt certain he could do the work. And the wages were good, the best he had earned since coming to America.

As he waited in line near the wharf to cash his cheque, he continued to mull over his next step. He was still undecided about making the return trip on the S. S. Marion, or if the ship preparing to set sail for Honolulu would be his next venture.

A porter's voice rose above the teeming crowd, shouting, "Telegram for Friesen! Hans Friesen! Telegram!"

Hans waved at the Western Union carrier, stumped about who would send him a telegram in San Francisco. He searched his pockets for a tip, then opened the message.

From *Lily*?

The message read:

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CG isn't the man I'm in love with.
Please return.
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Heart thundering in his chest, Hans read it again. And again.

CG Isn't the man …

What did it mean? Was she *not* marrying Garfield?

But … there *was* a man she loved …

Please return.

He rubbed his eyes and read it again. Did she mean *him*?

Could she love him?

He sucked in a breath, numb. He could not feel his arms or legs—only his heart, drumming in double-time.

A ship's horn startled Hans. Bolting into action, he sprinted to the shipping office and arrived just in time to sign on with the S. S. Marion for her return trip to Oregon.

~ * ~

Hans spent the next five days in wretched agony, praying, *willing* the ship to move more quickly, which only resulted in it moving, somehow, even more slowly. He re-read Lily's telegram countless times, trying to understand her meaning, trying to hear what she had left *unsaid*, and cursing the telegram's ten-word limit.

If Lily could have said more, what might she have said?

This was the question that kept him awake in his bunk long into the night.

As the ship sailed north, the telegram became soft from repeated handling. There were too many stops, too many ports along the way. The trip was taking far too long.

At each port, as he moved cargo, those

ten words churned over and over in his heart—the heart that felt as if it had sprouted wings. He saw her lovely face in his mind's eye, remembered the warmth of her nearness when she had tended to him, touched him, the way she had smiled at him. Was it foolish to hope that her feelings ran as deeply as his?

Finally, the S. S. Marion crossed the bar at the mouth of the Umpqua and was heading toward Gardiner ahead of schedule. As Hans gathered his things into his knapsack, his hand touched the book of poems stuffed in the bottom. He drew it out and thumbed through it, stopping at the Dickinson poem that he had quoted in his letter to Lily. Hilda had also translated this one into English for him in hopes he would use it to practice his English.

Hope is the thing with feathers that
perches in the soul, And sings the tune
without the words, and never stops at all.

Hope. *This* was what had energized Hans, given him a new outlook. Hope that he could make something of himself, hope for a future. Hope in the One who had given Lily the gift of healing and a desire to care for people in their infirmity.

Did he dare hope for a future with Lily?

Her telegram had given him hope, and yet, with only ten words at her disposal, her feelings were not entirely clear.

Was it Lily's duty to be clear? No. It was Hans who needed to declare his feelings and wishes, to take the risk, just as he had risked his future on a dilapidated tugboat.

But it was not his hard-won savings he was risking this time—it was his heart.

I have nothing to offer you now, dearest Lily, he rehearsed, *but I will make something of myself, and if you would wait for me, I will work harder than I ever have so that I may soon ask for your hand.*

He rehearsed it in English, over and over, as the river pilot guided the ship to dock.

Heart pounding, Hans went to the railing, intending to be the first one off. He would head straight for her house, even if he had to run all the way to Crestview Heights on foot. He could scarcely wait for the gangplank to be lowered and for the lumbering oafs who had gotten ahead of him to move out of his way.

~ * ~

Every morning and afternoon since she had sent the telegram, Lily had gone down to the wharf and met the arriving vessels, searching the people coming down the gangplank, scrutinizing each face, no matter how silly it was to hope he could return so quickly. Or that he *would*. She had no idea if

he had even received her message. And just because she had asked him to return didn't mean he would or that he wanted to. She had no assurance, no reason to think he would come back. All she had was hope.

But hope was the thing with feathers …

… that sang the tune without the words…

She tried to keep hope alive each day, even when, after the last person had disembarked, there had still been no sign of him.

She would go on about her business. If he did come back, she would be there, waiting for him. Meanwhile, she had people to tend to, batches of tinctures and salves and syrups to make. Orders to fill. Widows to visit. A comforting touch and prayers of faith to offer.

If only her heart didn't feel as if it had been sliced to ribbons.

If only she wasn't bearing the increasing weight of regret, the agony in her gut because she hadn't taken the opportunity to tell him how much he meant to her while she'd had the chance—*regardless* of whether or not he felt the same. The agony of wondering if his leaving might have had something to do with her. Had she offended him? Hurt him in some terrible way?

If only she didn't feel so broken, so empty…

So in love.

Hope.

It was supposed to lift him, carry him, this thing with feathers.

But what if he could not spit out the words? Mouth dry and heart thundering, Hans strode past the riverfront shops, past the tavern, and through town without seeing any of it. He decided to take a shortcut through the field beyond the livery.

Flowers of yellow and white—daisies, maybe—grew in abundance in the neglected field, swaying in the September breeze. He snatched up a giant handful of them.

Because he was going to need all the help he could get.

A slender figure in the distance gave him pause—a woman in a flowered dress, crossing the field, walking in his direction. With golden-brown hair, coiled over one shoulder.

He froze, heart thumping so hard his chest hurt.

She kept walking, not yet seeing him. She looked like a dream. Like a sweet, perfect dream, so perfect that he wanted to never wake.

"Lily?" he called out, his voice deep and unsteady.

Shading her eyes, she stopped abruptly.

"*Hans*?"

He ran to her and then stopped, chest working like a bellows, feeling like he could not breathe, and worse, certain he could not speak even two coherent words together.

And sings the tune … without the words…

"You came back," she said softly, in awe. Tears glistened in her eyes.

"I love you," he blurted.

She gasped, mouth agape.

"De telegram …" he swallowed hard, heart pummeling inside his ribs so hard he could barely catch his breath. "You love … someone ..."

"*You*, Hans," she said, her lovely cheeks going quite pink. "I'm in love with *you*."

He sucked in a breath. Bursting with joy, he moved closer and looked into her eyes. "I will work ... very hard ... to be ... good provider. Will you … wait for me?"

Lily shook her head. "No."

His heart sank. "No?"

With a smile, she tilted her head. "I mean, no, I don't want to wait."

Frowning, he studied her, frantic to understand.

"Weren't you and Hilda planning to work together, as a team?"

Slowly, Hans nodded.

"Did she expect you to produce a house and a business the minute you arrived in America?"

He shook his head, watching her. “She ... knows dis will … take time.”

Lily nodded. “So do I.”

His heart melted. “Lily, I want ... to give you … more than I … have now.”

Love shone in her eyes. “Everything I want is right here.” She glanced down and donned a playful smile. “Bearing a bouquet.”

He glanced at the forgotten bouquet, then offered it to her, wishing he knew how to ask if she understood what she was getting.

She hugged the flowers to herself like a prized gift.

“I have no … house for you.”

“I do, and I’m happy to share.” Smiling, she looked into his eyes. “I’m not worried about the future. I know you, Hans, and I know the kind of man you are. You accomplish whatever you put your mind to.”

Her gaze held his, and hope shined there. And hope looked beautiful on her. So beautiful.

Slowly, he pulled off his hat, and went down on one knee, but his mind raced, frantic to come up with the words that he needed for her, for that moment. But they would not come.

His heart twisted. “Lily, I want to say dis … proper, but …” He blasted a breath. “My English—”

She touched his cheek. “Say it in Norsk. I

need to practice. I have a book, and I've been trying to learn, you see."

With a gasp, he took hold of both her hands, his heart like a river flooding its banks with love for this woman.

"Jeg elsker deg, Lily," he said, in Norsk, and continued with what she later learned was:

I love you, Lily. With all my heart. Your smile fills me with joy and takes my breath away. Your tender heart is a balm to my soul, and your faith makes me want to be a man you can trust to take care of you, to hold you, to pray with you. I want to share your laughter and tears, hopes and sorrows, trials and joys. You have brought sunshine to my clouded heart. I'm asking you to be my wife and make me happier than I know how to say—in any language. I promise to love you and protect you and care for you all the days of our lives.

Awed, she watched him as he spoke, and though perhaps she did not understand, she seemed to be listening with her heart. Tears glistened in her eyes by the time he finished.

"I don't know what you said," she said softly, "but it was beautiful, and with your help, I'm going to learn."

His smile stretched so wide his cheeks hurt. He tightened his grasp on her hands, soft and warm in his. "You … fill my heart," he said, carefully. "Will you … marry me and ... make me *very* happy?"

"Ja." With a tearful smile, she nodded. "Jeg elsker deg, Hans."

He rose to his feet, heart pounding, then pulled her close and held her tight, savoring her warmth, her softness, the way she fit so perfectly within the circle of his arms.

Yes! She said *yes*!

Slowly, he lowered his head and pressed his lips to hers, gently at first, then deeper. He kissed her cheek, her temple, and then her lips again, savoring the sweetness of finally holding the woman he loved.

Finally, though he did not want to, he pulled back and looked at her.

Her eyes remained closed.

"Lily?" he whispered.

Slowly, she opened her eyes. Love radiated from her gaze like the sudden break of dawn, her cheeks a lovely shade of pink.

With a knowing smile that made his knees feel like jelly, she whispered, "Me, too."

Hans smiled in return. They were going to understand each other just fine.

Hans held her hand as they walked along the wharf, warming Lily straight to her heart. On his other arm, her husband carried the picnic basket she had packed for their lunch. The warmth of the noonday sun, stirred by a gentle autumn breeze, couldn't have been any finer.

"It's too bad Mr. Garfield isn't around to see us off." Lily couldn't help but smile.

Hans eyed her. "Is too bad he lies."

"That was mean and childish of him. I can't imagine how anyone could make up such lies, just to be spiteful."

They reached the ramp that led down to where his boat was docked. Still holding her hand, Hans escorted her down the ramp. "Because you can not do that."

"Neither could you."

He drew a deep breath. "I wanted to … use pitchfork on him."

Lily felt her eyes widen. "Maybe then he would have gotten the point." She tucked her lip between her teeth but a giggle escaped.

A smile broadened his face, his eyes twinkling.

They reached the dock and then walked carefully along the narrow strip, passing the vessels moored there.

"I can't believe Chester told everyone he

was needed in Eastern Oregon to manage some old family mining claim, when everyone in town knows his mother sent him out to the middle of nowhere as punishment for what he did to you."

When Lily had told Chester's mother of his behavior, she'd had no idea that Mrs. Garfield would respond as vigorously as she did, but Lily had to admit she was glad Chester was gone. Perhaps the change of scenery would do the man some good.

"I'm still upset that he did that to you," Lily said lightly. "When I told him I wasn't interested in him, he must have gone straight to the livery to take out his anger on you."

Hans studied her fingers, woven through his. He lifted their clasped hands and kissed the back of hers, eyes questioning. "Why to me?"

"I can't answer for him, but …" She tilted her head and peered at him with a mischievous smile. "He probably saw that I had eyes for no one but you."

Hans inhaled deeply, then smiled.

Taking great care, he guided Lily along the swaying dock until they reached the last boat, a small tug, with a single word freshly painted across the stern.

Hans studied the word, as if studying a work of fine art. "She is de first of many, I hope. She is my … future." He turned to Lily,

eyes alight with something new, a glow she had never seen there. A mix of hopeful pride and anticipation. "*Our* future."

She squeezed his hand and smiled.

"Lily," he said, his voice low, unsteady. "When I come to America, I lost hope." He took her hands in his and held them as if holding a delicate treasure. "But I found again. Here." He pressed a kiss to the palm of her hand, then lifted his gaze to meet hers.

Love shone in his eyes.

She pulled him into an embrace, then he helped her board the newly restored vessel named *HOPE*.

~ * ~

One Friday morning, much like any other, Lily Friesen checked on her crate of remedies and supplies that her husband had carefully stowed on board, making sure the lid was secure.

Then, while Hans stoked the boiler and checked the valves, Lily paused to say a silent prayer of thanks for her husband, for the Lord's help, and to ask for His healing touch for the people she was about to visit along the Smith River.

Then she joined her husband at the helm.

Hans guided the tugboat away from its moorings, and then, steering with one arm

and tugging his girl close with the other, he aimed the vessel upriver.

And breathed out a contented sigh.

Come then to this Physician,
His help he'll freely give;
He makes no hard condition,
'Tis only look and live.

There is a balm in Gilead,
To make the wounded whole;
There's power enough in heaven,
To cure a sin-sick soul.

"The Sinner's Cure" by Washington Glass
Revivalist Hymnal, c1853

Author Note

For part of my childhood, I lived in Reedsport, Oregon and, for a time, up the Smith River, where my mother and her sisters grew up (and for a time, had to take a boat to school). Grandpa Roberts and his parents built their home and dairy farm in the area around the time of this story. Lily might have delivered her remedies to my Grandpa (a boy of nine in 1913), and his family on her travels up and down the Smith River. In fact, Bert, the boy with the sick puppy, and his brother, Ben, got their names from my Grandpa Bert and his brother.

Why a Norwegian, you may ask? My husband's paternal grandparents came from Norway. Also, my Norwegian friend, Lisbet, to whom this story is dedicated, was the one who ~~twisted my arm~~ encouraged me to write my very first novel, a cross-continental love story between pen-pals.

Other Works

Like There's No Tomorrow

Like a Love Song

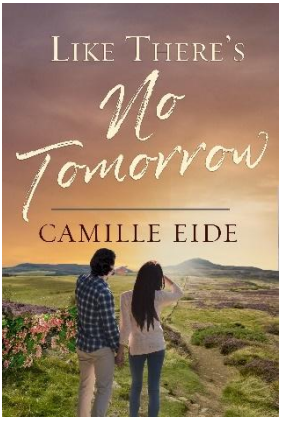
The Memoir of Johnny Devine

Wings Like a Dove

The Secret Place

Savanna's Gift, a Christmas Novella

Like There's No Tomorrow



What if loving means letting go?

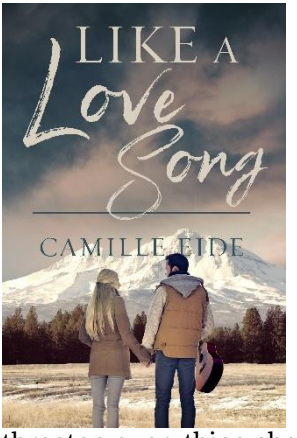
Scottish widower Ian MacLean is haunted by grief, regret, and a future that feels painfully empty. His only hope for peace lies in bringing his stubborn grandmother's sister home to Scotland—but first he'll have to convince her devoted young companion, Emily Chapman, to let her go.

Emily has spent years caring for foster teens and the beloved aunt who became her safe place in the world. But beneath her steady compassion lingers a quiet fear of uncertainty, loss, and the risk of loving too deeply.

Set between the rugged beauty of Scotland and the high desert of Central Oregon, Like There's No Tomorrow is an emotionally rich story about grief, belonging, found family, second chances, and the courage to embrace joy while life is still unfolding. Filled with warmth, quirky humor, quietly

wounded souls, and hard-won hope, this is a story about learning to love deeply—even when tomorrow is uncertain.

Like a Love Song



When she finally surrenders her heart, will it be too late?

Susan Quinn has spent years building a refuge for castaway teens at Juniper Ranch, but foreclosure, old wounds, and mounting fear threaten everything she's fought to protect. The last person she wants help from is Joe Paterson—a quiet, big-hearted oil-rig worker with a painful past, a guitar, and a God he keeps calling Father.

Set against the raw beauty of Oregon's high desert, Like a Love Song is an emotionally layered story about hidden wounds, fear-driven choices, found family, and the terrifying risk of being truly seen. Through hard truths, unexpected humor, grace, and hard-won hope, this story journeys through

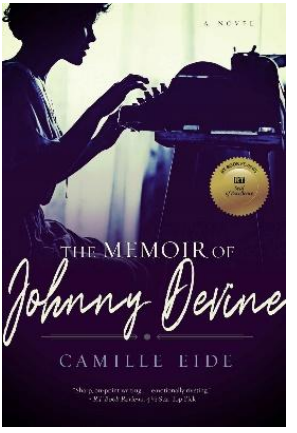
difficult emotional territory—but never leaves readers there.

Perfect for readers who love emotionally rich stories about messy humanity, healing, belonging, and people learning they are not beyond grace.

Romantic Times gives Like a Love Song a "Top Pick" 4.5 star review.

The Memoir of Johnny Devine

Love can't rewrite the pages of one's past, but it can cover a multitude of sins a page at a time.



In 1953, war widow Eliza Saunderson reluctantly accepts a job ghostwriting the memoir of former Hollywood heartthrob Johnny Devine—a man whose scandalous past once made headlines across America. Rumor says Johnny can charm anything in a skirt. But the man Eliza

meets is nothing like the reckless celebrity she expected.

Beneath Johnny's fame lie old wounds, buried secrets, and questions neither of them can outrun. As Eliza is drawn to the quiet grace beneath John's public image, the line between truth and illusion begins to blur in ways that threaten both their hearts.

When Eliza's writing places her under suspicion during the McCarthy era, she and John become entangled in an investigation that forces them to confront painful secrets, public scrutiny, and the lingering shame of the past. Set against the glamour and disillusionment of 1950s America, The Memoir of Johnny Devine is an emotionally rich story about hidden identities, redemption, grace, and the risk of believing that love might have the last word.
Filled with warmth, wit, emotional depth, and hard-won hope, this is a story about flawed people learning they are not beyond grace.

Wings Like a Dove

Can the invisible walls that separate people ever come down?

In 1933, Anna Leibowicz has lost faith in the American dream that brought her Jewish family from Poland to America. Her father has vanished, her future has collapsed, and a painful secret leaves her believing she no longer belongs anywhere—not even with the people she loves most.

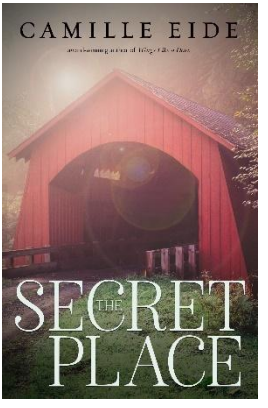
Hoping to find her missing father and somehow redeem them both, Anna leaves home and journeys to rural Indiana, where she unexpectedly finds refuge among a houseful of orphan boys, a community of misunderstood outsiders, and Thomas Chandler—a quiet, deep-hearted caretaker whose compassion unsettles her guarded heart.

But the small town around them is increasingly divided by prejudice, fear, and suspicion. As hostility grows toward

immigrants, Catholics, and the young Black boy Thomas has taken in, Anna finds herself torn between protecting those she's come to love and fleeing before her own secrets bring them harm.

Set during the Great Depression, Wings Like a Dove is an emotionally rich story about hidden wounds, belonging, prejudice, grace, and the invisible walls that separate people from one another. Filled with warmth, quiet humor, found family, spiritual depth, and hard-won hope, it's a story about wounded people learning they are not beyond love—or God's grace.

The Secret Place
How far can love bend before it breaks?



Josie Norris became an instant mommy when her twin sister handed over her newborn son and vanished. What Josie saw as a temporary arrangement grew into a mother-son bond too deep to uproot. But with her irrational sister threatening to

steal him back, Josie has been living the last few years with Kennedy in hiding, afraid to go home. When Aunt Libby, the only person who knows the truth about Kennedy, suffers a traumatic head injury, Josie rushes to her McKenzie River home to help Gram care for the woman who raised her. But not only is Libby's injury causing family secrets to spill, it's forcing Josie to see the women in her life in a new light.

Will, a ranger who Kennedy adores and who Josie is determined not to, is desperate to help the woman who has stolen his heart. But can Josie ever truly be authentic with the man she loves? With her son's fate hanging in the balance, she is faced with risking everything she loves to bridge a most impossible gulf.

In this complex love story of mothers, daughters, and sisters, Josie must find the grace to forgive people for not being who she needed them to be…and the courage to surrender her fears to the God who has never once left her side.

Camille's books are available at
CamilleEide.com

About the Author

Camille writes emotionally layered stories that explore the hidden world beneath human behavior—where fear, shame, longing, grief, brokenness, and grace quietly shape the way people see themselves and one another.

Though her novels often contain romance, love is never the destination, but the pressure chamber that reveals truth, strips away illusion, tests faith, and invites transformation, grace, and belonging. Drawn to imperfect people and quietly wounded souls, she writes with warmth, compassion, slightly twisted humor, and spiritual insight (that is sometimes uncomfortable—but in a good way).

These are stories that journey through hard places—but always toward hope, healing, and the reminder that no one is beyond God's grace.

Camille hopes readers come away from her stories feeling seen, encouraged, and with a renewed hope in the unfailing love of God.

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